

Vixens Sharpen Metallurgy Skills, Earn Honors at National Bladesmithing Competition

Sweet Briar engineering students earn honorable mention at a national bladesmithing competition, applying classroom concepts to hands-on design.

SWEET BRIAR, VA, UNITED STATES, April 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Every two years, the [Minerals, Metals & Materials Society \(TMS\)](#) hosts a bladesmithing competition as a part of its annual meeting. For the second time, Sweet Briar College students entered their own creation, this year's project receiving an honorable mention.

Building on the experiences of the 2024 group of three that entered a Roman Pompeii Gladius sword, five Vixens tried their hand at making a blade for this year's competition.

“

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Michelle Gervasio Assistant Professor of Engineering

“It's a great learning experience about actually applying some of the material science that they learn in the classroom,” said Dr. Michelle Gervasio, assistant professor of engineering, who assembled the team and mentored them throughout the process. “There's a difference between hearing about things like cold working and annealing, but then actually physically banging on a piece of metal and seeing how it reacts, they get to really tangibly experience some of those concepts they're learning in the classroom, which I think is great.”

The 2026 submission is a pattern-welded, Damascus-style blade, nicknamed the “foxtail,” with a sand-cast fox pommel and crossguard, and a pecan-wood handle. Forge-welded, the students



Sweet Briar students earn honorable mention at bi-annual bladesmithing competition.

gained metallurgy and other technical experience while crafting their submission from scratch. To make the pattern-welded blade, the group heated a stack of alternating layers of two different steel alloys, hammered it together, and then twisted it to produce the pattern that's visible in the blade.

"We did this two years ago, and I think this blade is like a level up from what we did that time. It was great to see them improve, take it seriously, and do a great job," Dr. Gervasio noted.

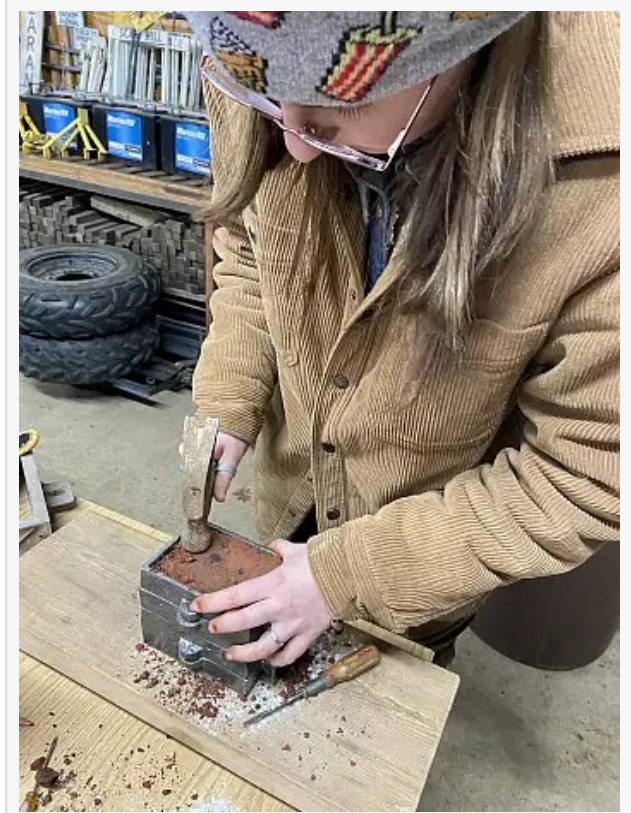
Additionally, the team compiled numerous other materials as part of their submission, including a 10-page report, a video, and a poster. Among this year's cohort is Nathalie Schelin '26, who was also a part of the 2024 team.

"This year offered a chance to make something more technically complex and apply lessons learned from the previous competition. I wanted the chance to experiment with techniques I hadn't done before, particularly pattern welding to produce the modern variant of Damascus steel," said Nathalie. "I like engineering because it combines theory with practical applications, and this project has been a great way to explore the practical side of the field. Learning about the phase diagram for steel in materials science class, to pick one example, means a lot more when the process for forging and heat treating a blade you've made depends on that diagram. I am also always happy for a chance to get my hands dirty!"

Other members of this year's cohort include Emily Kempin '26, Allison Kent '26, Karlie Lester '27, and Emma Staton '26, most of whom are engineering science majors. Dr. Gervasio recruited students to participate in the competition as an extracurricular activity. She was joined by Nathalie and Emily at the TMS Annual Meeting to present their project, which was on display in the exhibition hall from March 16-18. As a part of the competition, those in attendance had full access to a professional conference where they learned about cutting-edge research and had many networking opportunities.

As one of 26 participating teams, the Sweet Briar group was awarded an honorable mention after judging, earning a \$100 cash prize and a certificate.

"I am so proud of the team for winning the Honorable Mention award. They were up against some very stiff competition from much larger universities," said Dr. Gervasio. "I can hardly wait to start building the team for the next competition!"



Emily Kempin '26 uses a brass sand-cast to make the blade's fox pommel and crossguard.

At Sweet Briar, [engineering students](#) don't just study concepts—they bring them to life. From forging Damascus-style blades to presenting at national conferences, students gain hands-on experience that prepares them for careers and graduate study. With personalized mentorship, small classes, and real-world opportunities, Sweet Briar empowers women to lead in STEM fields. Ready to build your future? Visit sbc.edu/admissions or contact admissions@sbc.edu to learn more.

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The competition group's pattern-welded, Damascus-style blade, nicknamed the "foxtail"



Karlie Lester '27, Emma Staton '26, Nathalie Schelin '26, and Emily Kempin '26

The logo for Sweet Briar College features the words "SWEET", "BRIAR", and "COLLEGE" stacked vertically in a white, serif font against a solid magenta background. The text is centered within a white rectangular border.

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